

## THE ANTI-GARDENER

By Scott Adkins

### CHARACTERS

TOMÁS

BAKER

MOTHER

KING GAO SAN

### DESIGN NOTES

This play is more an opera than a play.

### ENTER THE LAND OF GAO-SAN

*TOMÁS sits in ritual form with KING GAO-SAN. TOMÁS has a tattoo on his neck in the shape of a star with eighteen lines around the edge.*

KING GAO-SAN: I present to you, Tomás, the map to the Garden for Butterflies. No one has looked at this map in a thousand years.

TOMÁS: Yes.

KING GAO-SAN: It is the joining of your family and mine that brings us finally to the moment of ending the tyranny of the Garden for Butterflies.

TOMÁS: Thank you sir.

KING GAO-SAN: You are very brave. We put the land *Gao-San* in your trust. Take this map and protect it with your life.

TOMÁS: I will sir.

KING GAO-SAN: May I hold the star?

TOMÁS: Certainly.

*TOMÁS removes the Anti-Gardener's star from inside his robe. He hands it to KING GAO-SAN.*

KING GAO-SAN: It is true. This is it. I knew it from the moment I saw the markings on your neck.

There are eighteen pawns in the star. Each able to destroy a virtue of the Garden for Butterflies. Each pawn designed to assert itself over a fragment of life. Hope.

TOMÁS: Basil.

KING GAO-SAN: Yes. Enduring.

TOMÁS: Spearmint.

KING GAO-SAN: Hardworking.

TOMÁS: Dill weed.

KING GAO-SAN: Happy.

TOMÁS: Lilac.

KING GAO-SAN: Adventurous.

TOMÁS: Hyacinth.

KING GAO-SAN: Curious.

TOMÁS: Sunflowers.

KING GAO-SAN: Committed.

TOMÁS: Bleeding hearts.

KING GAO-SAN: Oh excellent. Considerate.

TOMÁS: Daisies.

KING GAO-SAN: Well done Tomas. Now the last one requires nine pawns all on its own. Courage.

TOMÁS: Snap dragons.

Beginning with sunflowers

Then thunder-less lightning

Wilted orange blossoms

Animals go hunting

Rabbits leave last

Empty clouds bring dark nights

We must stop the Garden for Butterflies before it is too late

Before it is too late

Before it is too late.

Each pawn in the case is a fragment of life. Each pawn will assert itself over the unnatural until the Garden for Butterflies is no more.

KING GAO-SAN: Tomás, you are ready.

TOMÁS: Thank you.

## **ENTER THE GARDEN FOR BUTTERFLIES**

*TOMÁS is tired and his clothes are shredded from many days of travel over rough mountain terrain.*

TOMÁS: It took me many days to reach the pass of Mt. Gao that would lead me to the Garden for Butterflies. There I encountered the legendary Yeti. The Yeti greeted me with sharp teeth and a war cry. I offered him a bushel of carrots. In the end, the carrots saved my life and the old Yeti revealed the meaning of the symbols of the map. The same number of days later, I descended beyond the pass of Mt. Gao. I am the first anti-gardener in a thousand years to make the crossing and enter the Garden for Butterflies.

It is an unnatural garden.

*MOTHER emerges from her snail shell.*

MOTHER: Really.

TOMÁS: In the dead of winter, it thrives. Nothing stops this garden from growing.

MOTHER: I know this place. My dear love, Baker, runs this garden, yes? He is the gardener.

TOMÁS: I don't see any people. Just things growing...

MOTHER: Yes, beauty growing.

TOMÁS: ...in a most disgusting way.

MOTHER: I have missed my garden. Really.

TOMÁS: Oh yes.

MOTHER: I like the way your lip curls up like that.

TOMÁS: Oh.

MOTHER: I am very cold. I know we hardly know one another but may I borrow your shirt for a bit.

TOMÁS: Sure.

*TOMÁS removes his shirt. He has one human arm and his other arm is an ape arm. It is grotesque where the arm is attached, oozing and looking like it may be infected.*

MOTHER: Is that your arm?

TOMÁS: It is now. Occupational hazard, I lost it in a fire.

MOTHER: Oh. May I?

TOMÁS: If you must.

*MOTHER strokes his arm.*

MOTHER: So soft. I wouldn't expect it to be so soft. And warm.

TOMÁS: It does the trick. I mean I would have preferred a human arm but...

MOTHER: This is wonderful. *(Pause.)* Seems like you are a traveling man.

TOMÁS: Uh, yeah. I'm camping out in the garden.

## **RETURN OF MOTHER OF SOULS TO THE GARDEN FOR BUTTERFLIES**

*BAKER enters wearing a traveling cloak.*

BAKER: My love, you have returned. What will I tell the children?

MOTHER: Where are they?

BAKER: Under their beds. They refuse to sleep in the bed because you were gone.

MOTHER: We can all sleep together now.

BAKER: Yes. Water?

MOTHER: Yes.

*There is a flash.*

MOTHER: Please don't count. It doesn't matter.

BAKER: I like to know.

MOTHER: I know but I am asking...

BAKER: ...I like to know if it is coming or going.

MOTHER: ...but I am asking, for this one storm. Let it be.

*They hear dogs barking.*

BAKER: They're counting.

MOTHER: Yes. So let them do it.

BAKER: Where have you been?

MOTHER: I have been searching one ocean after another.

BAKER: I started to believe you were gone forever. *(Pause.)* I opened a barbeque restaurant. It's not doing well.

MOTHER: I dream for two weeks at time now.

BAKER: We serve chicken, ribs, pulled pork, pulled chicken.

MOTHER: Will you watch our baby?

BAKER: Will he talk to me?

MOTHER: He will talk to you. I am sure of it.

BAKER: I will get you your water.

*MOTHER re-enters her snail shell for a respite. BAKER goes to get her water. TOMÁS emerges from his tent in the Garden for Butterflies and begins planting the pawns to destroy the garden as he sings this song.*

TOMÁS: Hello red bird

I am here to sing  
 For you I dig a hole  
 And plant this special seed  
 This place is not natural  
 On a winter eve  
 Everything should be dead  
 Not thriving instead  
 I am cold, so cold  
 But here there is something more  
 My heart is empty  
 Without you I can't dream  
 You took all my dreams with you  
 I sleep alone on a dark floor  
 Now I am cold so cold  
 But here there is something more  
 No comfort, no warmth  
 No sweet smell of your hair  
 I try not to stare  
 But I see you everywhere  
 Where have you gone  
 Please come home red bird

Please come home

*(No longer singing.)* These stars are disturbing to me, see? Even the slugs are out here, I am alone here where it is supposed to be cold but it is not cold, how? This butterfly garden is thriving, full of life in the dead of winter. It is supposed to be dead. Maybe under the sea is where my answers lay. These pawns will change it to the way it is supposed to be.

*MOTHER emerges from her snail shell.*

MOTHER: You won't find anything at the bottom of the sea.

TOMÁS: You are so beautiful.

*BAKER enters with the glass of water and hands it to the smiling MOTHER.*

BAKER: Yes she is, this is my wife and she is Mother of Souls. Who are you?

MOTHER: Thank you Baker, I am thirsty.

TOMÁS: I am Tomás. You must be Baker.

BAKER: Yes, I am. Look at her bright ocean blue eyes, inside her eyes is a sea of life and an endless depth of being. She is peace and flows with love, she is not Mother Earth; earth lost her mother long ago to a barn fire on the field of tyranny. This snail is the Mother of Souls, the keeper of hope, the catcher of lost souls. She was there when the Titanic lost its footing. She is here now waiting, watching blissfully in the Garden for Butterflies as you plant your pawns.

*A lightning flash.*

BAKER: One. Two. Three.

TOMÁS: I didn't realize you were a snail.

BAKER: Of course, she is. Thank you for coming by. *(Beat.)* You left a card right?

TOMÁS: I'm not leaving.

BAKER: Oh.

TOMÁS: My arm is going numb.

BAKER: You are thirsty then too? I will get you water.

*BAKER leaves to get water and returns immediately with a glass of water. TOMÁS continues planting the pawns.*

TOMÁS: That's nice but won't help. Will you help me plant these pawns.

BAKER: I am a gardener, I am very good at that.

TOMÁS: These pawns are not the typical seeds. I am the Anti-Gardener.

BAKER: What? Did you hear that Mother, after a thousand years of peace the anti-gardener comes with a pocket of seeds and an ape arm.

MOTHER: I am sorry I forgot about the Snapdragons.

*MOTHER leaves. Moments pass. BAKER is not sure what to do about TOMÁS, as in should he wrestle him or just give him the stink eye. MOTHER returns wearing a yellow poncho pinned with hundreds of claws from crows in the manner of clothespins. She carries a hammer.*

MOTHER: I am going to pound blades of grass on this anvil into an army of Snapdragons.

*MOTHER begins pounding blades of grass on the anvil. Each time she hits the anvil it sounds like an exquisite ringing bell.*

BAKER: When I walked, to get you this glass of water, I came upon a farmhouse where inside they were performing the great opera “The Dragon.” I drank hot tea and ate ice cream.

The opera went like this.

*Open a curtain of robins and doves fly away to reveal an über opera house within the farmhouse.*

BAKER: The dragon is inside the opera house. In front of the opera house, on a table is an über vase and an über spoon. The opera house had four two-story windows which are open. There is dark and mysterious music.

*Dark and mysterious music begins.*

BAKER: There are no instruments, the music is all vocally performed, eventually flames burst from the windows of the opera house. A King emerges with a young maiden. He implores her to dance for the dragon before the world is engulfed in flames.

She refuses.

Music louder, flames more intense.

Screams. It was really hot by this point, and smoky. I feared for my life, the farmhouse seemed like it might catch fire but all the other people watching didn’t seem to notice, I was the only one who seemed to notice.

The house was shaking, the people in the front row were screaming in terror and ecstasy. The opera house was completely engulfed in flames. If I wasn’t so tired from walking through all that quicksand I would have left, I thought, this isn’t a bad way to go.

The maiden comes forth. She opens her heart to the sky, a pure single note of sound emerges from her, then she dances – a moon dance – I have seen it before but not in quite this way – she dances beautifully – I am quite aroused and fearing for my life. The flames die down, the dragon sleeps for a thousands years. The King Gao-San and Queen return singing a love song while the maiden lies dead before them...

I wept into this cup and have filled it with my tears. It is all I have for you now.

*BAKER offers TOMÁS the glass of tears.*

TOMÁS: Uh.

MOTHER: I’ll drink them Baker.

BAKER: No. I brought my tears for Tomás.

TOMÁS: Is it really your tears?

MOTHER: I’ll take the...

BAKER: It is, and they are pure and innocent.

TOMÁS: Have you ever tasted them?

MOTHER: Please, give me the...

BAKER: No.

TOMÁS: I think I’ll pass.

MOTHER: Tomás, if you take the tears you can give them to me and I’ll drink them.

TOMÁS: I don't want the tears though.

BAKER: Fine.

*BAKER gulps down the tears in one gulp.*

TOMÁS: You...

MOTHER: Baker! How could you?

BAKER: They're mine. I got them for Tomás, he didn't want them.

MOTHER: Baker.

BAKER: Yes?

MOTHER: Inside your belly is a vase filled with knots. They say it will pass naturally, the knots. The vase will remain and that it won't bother you. You'll just have a vase inside of here.

*Enter KING GAO-SAN.*

KING GAO-SAN: Mother!

TOMÁS: King Gao-San!

MOTHER: I would recognize those yellow arms and long finger nails anywhere. We end it here.

KING GAO-SAN: No.

MOTHER: No?

KING GAO-SAN: No. I did not come for you. I came to watch your garden die.

BAKER: Who is this?

MOTHER: Never.

KING GAO-SAN: Little red bird has come home.

MOTHER: You can't.

TOMÁS: Bow your head fool. It is King Gao-San. He is the master of the land of Gao. He is the King of the Anti-Gardeners. Bow Baker, bow!

BAKER: Why is he here?

TOMÁS: He must have followed me.

*The Garden for Butterflies begins to wilt.*

TOMÁS: *(Whispers.)* It's already happening.

MOTHER: I have a Snapdragon army here Gao, you don't have a chance.

KING GAO-SAN: Have the pawns been planted?

TOMÁS: Yes.

KING GAO-SAN: See here Mother? A thousand years this has been coming and...

BAKER: ...Oh Mother, what have they done?

MOTHER: They have planted the Anti-Gardener's star.

BAKER: The Snapdragons will protect with courage.

MOTHER: Look! It is not enough, the rabbits have left.

TOMÁS: The rabbits are the last to leave.

MOTHER: The Garden for Butterflies has been around since my beginning. I cannot survive without it.

*MOTHER lays down in the garden and rests.*

KING GAO-SAN: Good night Mother.

*KING GAO-SAN and TOMÁS leave.*

MOTHER: I left to look for my heart, Baker.

I thought I'd lost my heart

I couldn't feel it anymore

I searched the bottom of the ocean

To the inside of a red hot ember

I couldn't find it anywhere

I came home to you my love. My heart has been here all the time. Right here in the garden.

*The garden dies. The animals hunt. Lightning flashes but thunder does not crack. Clouds darken the sky but rain does not come.*

BAKER: Not even the Snapdragons could protect the garden with all their courage.

*BAKER picks up a knife. He puts it to his belly and cuts. He reaches into his belly and pulls out a green and brown vase.*

BAKER: I have a surprise for you. I will dig my hands into the warm clay of the earth. I make a spiral outward.

MOTHER: You have nothing to put into the hole.

BAKER: Hold out your hands Mother.

*BAKER tips the vase and seeds and bulbs pour into MOTHER'S hands.*

BAKER: The knots do come to pass.

MOTHER: Seeds. Bulbs. The garden.

BAKER: A new garden for you. I hid them in the vase and hid the vase in my belly until I knew it was safe.

*BAKER buries the seeds and bulbs with his hands.*

BAKER: There. Now we can rest.

*End.*

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